



**MISSOULA AREA  
EDUCATION COOPERATIVE  
2825 Stockyard Road, Suite I-2**

Phone: (406) 532-4861  
Fax: (406) 532-4866

**Linda Maass**  
lmaass@missoulaaec.com  
Director

**Connie J. Bauman**  
cjbautman@missoulaaec.com  
Business Manager

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School Funding Interim Commission  
PO Box 201706  
State Capitol  
Helena, MT. 59620

RE: Special Needs Bills Drafts

I'm writing to the commission on behalf of the the 14 member Missoula Area Education Cooperative (MAEC) school districts located in Missoula, Lake, Sanders and Mineral counties. These 14 school districts had a fall 2015 total ANB of approximately 3,200 K-12 students, of which 533 (17%) were students with disabilities.

The cost for educating students with disabilities far exceeds state allocations for special education, resulting in schools increasingly having to utilize their general fund budgets. As a representative illustration, one of the MAEC K-8 schools has a special education population for the past three years which ranges from 24-28% of the enrollment; the overall enrollment in K-8 has decreased over the years, from a high of 126 students to 103. In order to provide appropriate special education and related services, the following amounts have had to be spent from the general fund budget while experiencing an overall declining enrollment:

2015-2016:	\$ 184,945.17
2014-2015:	\$ 108,228.57

The significant increase for this past year is the result of providing an appropriate educational program for one student with severe autism spectrum disorder. Since one manifestation of his disability is challenging behaviors ( i.e., biting, hitting, scratching), this student's and others safety requires two adults to supervise him for his entire school day (5 hours); since the district could not keep personnel to work with this student because of these challenging behaviors, the district was forced to raise the hourly rate of pay for adult paraprofessionals working with only this one student to \$ 20 per hour (per adult). Additionally, because of this student's unique needs, an autism consultant was required to train those adults working with this student; the autism consultant cost was approximately \$3,000 per month for the entire school year.

As the Director of the Missoula Area Education Cooperative (MAEC), I strongly urge the commission to support those bill drafts to increase the state special education payments for cooperatives.

*Linda Maass*  
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Director